

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAJ-01
EB-08 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /068 W
-----262106Z 054314 /71

R 261713Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9915
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
USMISSION EC BRUSSELS
USMISSION BERLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 01428

E. O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: EEC, UK
SUBJECT: DIRECT ELECTIONS TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
REF: STATE 19304 (76)
1. ON JANUARY 26 WE SAW IVOR ROBERTS, FOREIGN OFFICE
WORKING LEVEL OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE FOR DIRECT ELECTIONS
TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. ROBERTS WAS SLIGHTLY
BULLISH ON PROSPECTS THAT BRITAIN WOULD MEET THE
1978 DEADLINE.
2. AS WE HAVE REPORTED, THE PRINCIPAL PROBLEM FOR THE
DIRECT ELECTION ENABLING LEGISLATION IS THE DEVOLUTION
BILL IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS. THAT DEBATE WILL GO ON
AND ON AND ON THROUGH THE SPRING. AS LONG AS IT DOES,
THE GOVERNMENT IS RELUCTANT TO INTRODUCE A SECOND
MAJOR CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE AT WESTMINSTER. NONETHELESS,
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ROBERTS IS HOPEFUL THAT THE DIRECT ELECTIONS BILL WILL
HAVE FIRST READING IN THE COMMONS BEFORE THE EASTER
RECESS. THERE WOULD THEN ENSUE SIX OR SEVEN PRELIMINARY
DAYS OF DEBATE DURING A THREE-WEEK PERIOD. THAT
RELATIVELY RESTRICTED DISCUSSION WOULD MEAN THAT THE
DIRECT ELECTIONS LEGISLATION WOULD BE CRUDE IN SOME
WAYS, ESPECIALLY CONCERNING THE BOUNDARY COMMISSIONS'

MANDATE. THE LORDS WOULD THEN PLAY A WHILE ON THE BILL, WITH SOME FORLORNLY STRIKING THE PR CHORD, BEFORE RETURNING IT FOR A LAST TIME TO THE COMMONS. ALL THE SAME, IN ROBERTS' VIEW THE PRESSURE FROM BRITAIN'S COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND THE MAJORITY WISH OF THE HOUSES TO SEE THE UK MEET THE DEADLINE SHOULD ALLOW THE BILL TO PROCEED THROUGH WESTMINSTER AND ROYAL ASSENT BY THE SUMMER. THIS WILL DEPEND TO A LARGE EXTENT ON THE TORIES SINCE ROBERTS SAID CALLAGHAN AND CROSLAND BELIEVE AS MANY AS 150 LABOR MPS MAY NOT SUPPORT THE LEGISLATION.

3. COMMENT: ROBERTS, A CONVINCED EUROPEAN, MAY BE MORE PARTISAN THAN PROPHETIC IN THIS PROJECTION. BUT THE WASH OF EVENTS COULD BE ON THE EUROPHILES' SIDE. WITH BRITAIN IN THE COMMUNITY CHAIR, DEPENDENT ON GERMAN ECONOMIC BENEFICENCE, AND NAKED IN THE FACE OF PROBABLE FRENCH AND DANISH ACQUIESCENCE' CALLAGHAN MAY WELL DO JUST ENOUGH TO SLIP THE BILL THROUGH. BUT WE WOULD STILL MAKE THE ODDS NO BETTER THAN EVEN, THOUGH IMPROVING.

ARMSTRONG

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTIONS, CENTRAL LEGISLATURE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 26-Jan-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977LONDON01428
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770028-1010
Format: TEL
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770117/aaaaaonf.tel
Line Count: 85
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 3d2c08d1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 STATE 19304
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 04-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3497989
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DIRECT ELECTIONS TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
TAGS: PFOR, UK, EEC, EP
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/3d2c08d1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009